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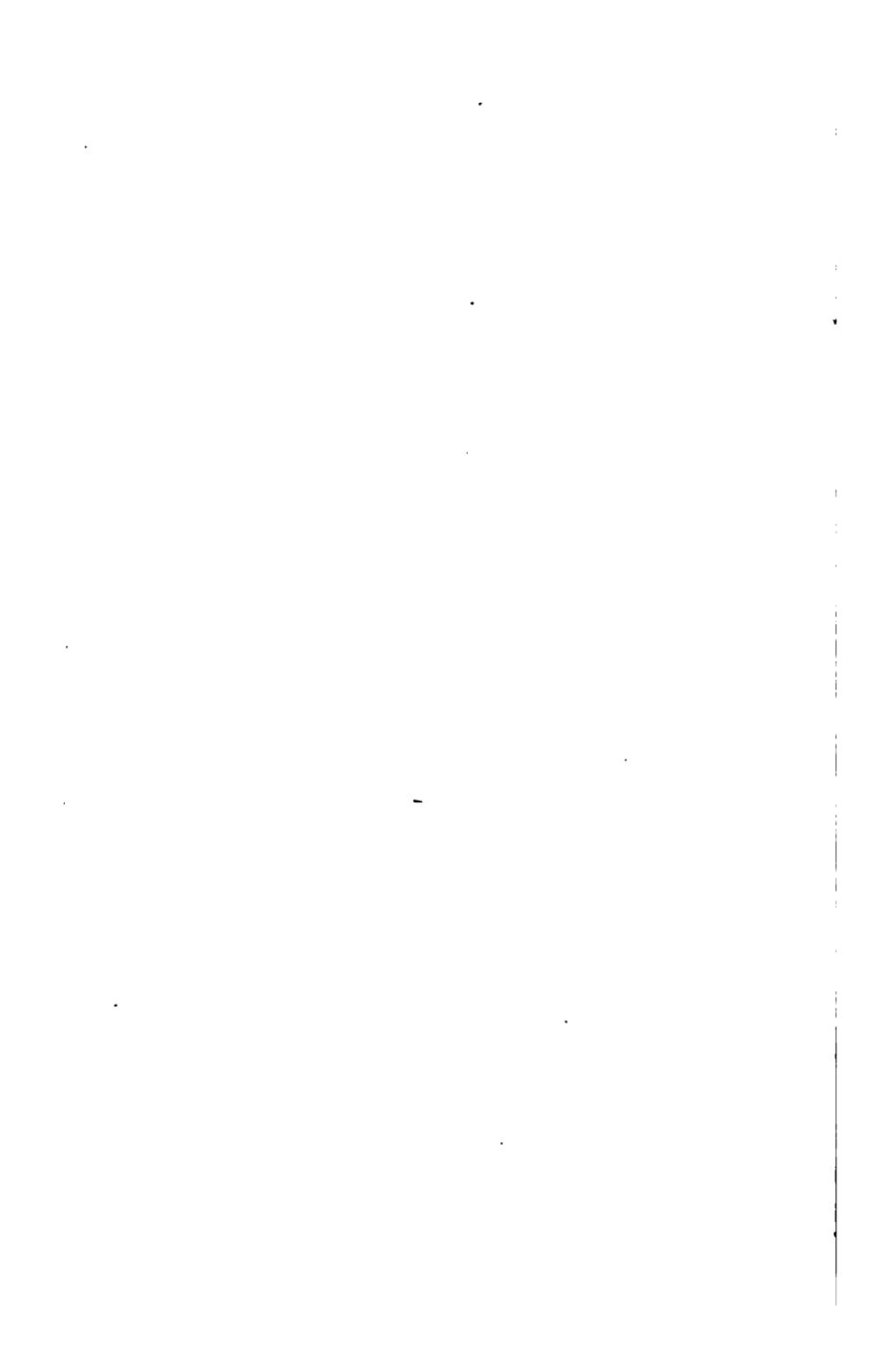
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DN 4

**'THOUGHTS,
ON TRUTH, ON PREJUDICE,
AND
ON SINCERITY,**

JOHN HOLLAND,

1795.

14/10.

26/10/96



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ON THE NATURE AND ADVANTAGES OF TRUTH;
AND
OF SINCERITY IN THE PROFESSION OF IT.

WHEN the artful and wicked Pilate wished to draw from Jesus Christ the acknowledgment, that he was a king, the Messiah not only assured him, that his kingdom was not of this world, but addressed him in these striking words: "For this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto the truth." John xviii. 37. "Pilate said unto him, WHAT IS TRUTH?" v. 38.

If this question be put with the desire of information, none can be more important.

It is probable, however, that the Roman governor was little interested to receive instruction from Jesus Christ, but was rather desirous to procure from him what would justify his approaching condemnation.

Gladly would Pilate have had nothing to do with him; but he himself had been guilty of so much injustice and oppression, that he durst not resist the clamorous demand of the Jews for the crucifixion of the Messiah.

His deeds might have come to light, and he have been deprived of his government, if he had opposed the proceedings of the Jews against one accused of seditious and treasonable practices.

In such circumstances, therefore, it is most probable, that Pilate meant only to deride or to confound Jesus Christ by the question, *what is truth?* His meaning might be, "The children of men are so various in their sentiments, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to know who are in the right. Amidst the endless speculations of the enquiring, who can point out what is certain and true? Is it not, then, easier, safer, and better, to sit down contented with what is already certainly known; and to remain in perfect ignorance and indifference concerning the rest of the truth?"

If such were Pilate's notions, there is little difference between them and another interpretation, which has been put upon his words.

They, who enquire in so careless and scoffing a manner, "*what is truth?*" are likeliest to adopt the other meaning attributed to the question of the governor, "*what is truth to me?*"

"If it be so difficult to be acquired, the children of men," it may be thought, "might as well go on in their errors, as waste their time in so uncertain and fruitless a search."

Pilate, however, sat in the seat of judgment, and was not so much concerned for the truth in general, as for some clue to direct him in so perplexing a case, as the trial of Jesus Christ.

His testimony, in such circumstances, to the innocence of the Messiah, is truly valuable; and his solicitude to release him, manifested a faint glimmering of honest integrity in his breast. But his scruples were soon overcome;

vercome ; and he was obliged, from interest or policy, to yield to the importunity of the cruel and malicious Jews.

But, waving the discussion of this subject, it is proposed to consider the two meanings put upon Pilate's question ; to shew that all men "are born and come into "the world to bear witness unto the truth;" and to lay down the rules for its acquisition.

It is not uncommon for light and worldly minds to ask Pilate's question, "what is truth?" Having not been habituated to serious and attentive reflection, and noticing the diversified opinions even of the enquiring, they too hastily conclude it to be a phantom or delusive appearance evading the search.

They, whose hearts are set upon pleasure, are averse to the trouble of seeking for truth, and have not firmness of mind enough for what they deem so arduous and painful an inquiry.

Such as estimate every thing by its worldly profit or loss, are little disposed for a pursuit, which, as they imagine, will not add to their wealth, but rob them of their treasure, or take away from them an opportunity of acquiring more. All these ask in a jocing manner, "what is truth?" and, from the little success attending their superficial inquiries, are too ready to affirm, that it is of little worth, and to say, "what is truth to us?"

Yet it is natural and reasonable to put these questions ; and when they are put by serious and honest minds, they are entitled to diligent consideration ; and demand a plain and explicit answer.

What, then, is TRUTH?

Generally speaking, it is a conformity between the nature of things and the ideas of the mind.

If the children of men had not a capacity to judge between what is true and what is false, it would not indeed be to any purpose to ask, "what is truth?" But as long as it is allowed that their senses give faithful representations of objects, so long it must be admitted that they may arrive at a degree of certainty in their notions.

They naturally prefer some thing to others; and, from what they see and hear, they may draw rational and probable conclusions.

For instance, there cannot be any doubt, whether twice two be or be not four; nor whether things which are equal to the same thing, be or be not equal to one another. Upon such plain and undeniable principles, however, the great truths of science are founded. The wise have risen from these simple and unquestionable assertions, to those heights of wisdom and knowledge, which are so justly valued and admired.

But, in general, truth rests upon experience and observation. Hence, little dependence can be placed on those theories and speculations, which have not had facts for their basis. Almost every thing, however, rests upon probability alone. None but perfect beings can attain to absolute and universal certainty. Is, then, probability unworthy of trust; or are mankind materially deceived by acting continually upon it? Whatever dependence they may reasonably place upon it, the same degree of assurance they may have of arriving

arriving at truth. Upon this presumption the whole business of human life is founded, so that mankind are either totally deluded, or there is such a thing as truth, which they may attain. The inquiring indeed may not ever be at a stand in their researches, or ever arrive at a point which they cannot pass. Nothing more can be meant by the perfectibility of human nature, than that none can say how much they are capable of improvement; or fix a place, beyond which it is not possible to proceed. The children of men are then capable of attaining the truth; which usually arises from the attentive consideration of what is probable or likely, and is established upon experiment and fact.

If any be desirous to know what is the truth in any particular kinds of knowledge, they must direct themselves by those general principles which lead to certainty in the common affairs of life. Do any wish, for instance, to become acquainted with moral and religious truths, they must procure all the information in their power, before they can decide which is the most probable and certain. Surely all will allow it to be a moral truth, that what promotes their greatest happiness in the end, it is their interest and their duty to perform.

Some have maintained truth to be the test of virtue itself; as if all who did wrong were guilty of deceit. In one sense they are. They at least deceive themselves, and mistake their true interest. The best notion of virtue then is, that it is most productive of lasting and solid happiness.

Truth is a branch of virtue, but nothing more. Thus applied, it takes the name of Sincerity, and will be entitled to consideration in the sequel.

Whilst there are so many disputes among mankind on the subject of religion, some may think it unlikely that the truth should ever be attained, and of little consequence whether it be or not. If, however, any credit be due to philosophy and the experience of mankind, all effects must have adequate causes, comprehending themselves and their works. Hence, if we consider the appearances and tendencies of nature; reason will conduct us to a wise, powerful, and good Being, the creator of all things. What degree of reflection is necessary for the discovery of this truth, or whether it was in fact the offspring of divine revelation, might form useful subjects for human enquiry. When made known, it approves itself to the natural reason of mankind, who would be lost in unfathomable difficulties without the supposition of an intelligent universal cause.

Like observations may be applied to the doctrine of a future state. If the children of men be but for solid and good reasons persuaded of its truth, it may seem rather immaterial to some from what origin the knowledge of it sprang. I myself ascribe it at once to divine revelation; but there are various presumptions in its favour, which have great weight with inquiring persons, and incline them to admit the doctrine as laid down in the Gospel, and confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The evidence for such an extraordinary occurrence should be examined like that of any historical circumstance whatever; and determined

terminated by those rules, which direct mankind to allow or reject the testimony of one another.

It is my duty to declare, that I do not claim the assent of the enquiring to any other religious principles than those which have been detailed. In this sense, therefore, I have endeavoured to point out the question, "what is truth?" and have been insensibly, though incidentally, led to point out the method by which it may be acquired. Can it then be reasonably asked, what is such truth to the children of men? It is every thing. Nothing can be more valuable or precious. Nothing can better lead them to a righteous course of conduct, than the influence of the divine example, and the hope of a favourable acceptance with their heavenly father.

It yet remains to point out the meaning and advantages of sincerity. Men cannot always speak the truth, because they do not always know it. They may speak error, believing it to be truth. They should indeed be cautious of spreading what is uncertain; but they never ought to speak what they know to be untrue. Sincerity, then, is the conformity of the expressions and behaviour with the thoughts and sentiments of the heart. It is founded on innocence and simplicity, and is totally averse to any kind of deceit. How little of it is found in the world! They are deemed ignorant, and despised as unexperienced, who are unpractised in the arts of fraud. How often do men utter sentiments different from the thoughts of their hearts!

In social and in civil life, among the different professions

feffions and employments of mankind, from the cottage to the court, duplicity and dissimulation are found greatly prevalent and abounding. In vain do any expect even those, who seem retired from the more public haunts of men, to be free from the influence of this general contagion. The disorder has spread so widely, that, doubtless, many think the business of mankind could not go on without it. Sages themselves have professed to vindicate the propriety of dissembling; and the children of mirth and wit have ever been ready to acknowledge, that were they strictly to adhere to truth, their talents would be entirely lost, and they would not any longer be able to set the table in a roar.

To such an extent has the evil spread, that sometimes the friends of truth really know not on what or whom to depend; all reports are regarded as almost equally fallacious, and common fame has been branded as a common liar.

When once a departure is made from truth and duty, it is without doubt difficult to draw the line, beyond which none should proceed. In one instance deceit may seem advantageous, but it may not be in the next; and it must be pernicious and useless, whenever it is in the least suspected.

Though there be not in fact any deception, yet the mind is corrupted by an intended deviation from truth, and prepared to disregard it for the sake of pleasure or interest. I forbear particulars: There would be no end in detailing them. Mankind allow themselves in thousands of practices inconsistent with sincerity and truth.

truth. What vain compliments, what empty, unmeaning, and false phrases do they use !

These may be dismissed with the observation, that, as they are of little signification, they are of no value, and should be dropped by those who have any regard for the simplicity of truth.

In the commerce of mankind, Sincerity takes the name of Faithfulness. Without doubt there would be an end to the whole intercourse of society, if the children of men could not in general depend upon one another. Hence they are taught to be faithful to their engagements, promises, and oaths. If this be morality, they should be careful not to enter into any engagements, not to make any promises, not to take any oaths, inconsistent with justice and virtue. Though they have promised or sworn to do wrong, they aggravate their guilt by the performance. Herod committed a grievous error, when he promised with an oath to give the daughter of Herodias whatever she demanded ; but his wickedness was still greater when he sent for the head of John the Baptist. He would undoubtedly have been justified in refusing the request. Where duty is clearly seen, oaths and promises can only bind to the performance. Even in matters of apparent indifference, if any make unconditional engagements, they disappoint and deceive others, they prepare themselves for deception, and set an example for the less scrupulous to exceed.

Much is said in favour of secrecy, without considering whether what is entrusted be for the benefit of mankind to be told.

I do not see how good persons can be eagerly desirous to be acquainted with seerets. If error and vice had never been concealed, they would not have obtained so wide a spread. Expose them, and their votaries are ashamed. Expose them, and they vanish away.

Where then, it may be asked, is the confidence of friendship? but I answer; how can there be friendship without virtue? and is it not virtuous to make friendship itself give way to the general good? Possibly in some instances it may not be right not to tell whatever is known; but in all cases the children of men should try their conduct by the great rule of justice, and by the prospect of promoting the utmost degree of felicity. It becomes them to do their duty, whether they be bound to it or not. Nothing, it is obvious, can bind them to what is wrong. But, it may be asked, who shall judge concerning wrong and right? What, should not the greatest happiness be the scope of men's endeavours; and have not christians reason and the word of God to direct them in the pursuit? It is the duty of all to inform their minds and to enlighten their consciences; but, after all, private judgment must be their guide. This is the divinity which dwells within them; the representative of God in their minds. The power of force cannot subdue it. It will not yield, but to reason and persuasion.

It is the duty of mankind to preserve it pure and inviolate; and to supply it with all necessary and useful information. In the day of trial it will stand the friend of such as possess it, and will keep them unspotted by the world.

These friends of truth, these conscientious and upright characters, will not accommodate or conceal their notions, nor gloss and varnish them over with a fair skeu of words capable of different meanings: They will not scruple to tell the whole truth: they will not shun to declare the whole will of God. If any keep back a part, which they apprehend may prove painful or offensive, it will soon be seen, that they have had recourse to unfair methods in the cause of truth, and the whole host of errors, prejudices and superstitions, will be raised, before reason can come with its full force to the attack.

Such short-sighted creatures, as the children of men, should not do evil, that good may come. Duty is clear, and the consequences are in the power of a Being, who has appointed all things for the best, and decreed that all things shall work together for the good of those who love God and keep his commandments. Knowledge is power; and there is a native majesty, an internal strength, a winning force of persuasion, in the simplicity of truth, which nothing can effectually resist or overcome. Check it, and it springs up again. Restraine it, and it breaks forth anew. Strike it, and it shines the more. Oppress it, and it rises indignant. Like the patient camomile, the more it is trampled upon, the more it flourishes. It is of God, and cannot be overthrown. To adopt a popular play upon words, the force of argument must overcome the argument of force.

They, who laugh and sneer at the prejudices of mankind, irritate much more than they who uniformly

ly and seriously oppose them without any disguise or concealment. Nay, when any part of the truth is thought to be hidden, some mean and interested motive is often suspected. Some may fancy, that they are laying the foundation for future enquiries, by a partial display of the principles of reason; but they are not aware how their notions and arguments may be perverted to the most dangerous and violent purposes. The seeds of the French revolution were sown, it is said, by philosophers under the monarchical system, which so fettered their enquiries, that they used ridicule as the test of truth, called in the aid of irony, or feebly drew some of the out-lines of reason, in expectation that posterity would fill them up. Impartial history, at a more distant period, may describe the consequences. A flood of light hath indeed been poured upon the European world; in many countries men's minds have undergone a total revolution; but the former too cautious mode of propagating truth, combining with its later sudden burst, among those, who have been rather dazzled with its splendor, than enlightened and cheared with its rays, has alarmed the ignorant, and ranged the prejudiced and narrow-minded in martial array against principles, which had so long been kept secret by the children of philosophical enquiry.

Like errors have been committed in England by those who call themselves Dissenters, when, inconsistently with their principles, they have attempted to act as a body in the state. As they chanced to be seeking the repeal of the Test laws at the time when the French revolution was proceeding, the clamor was soon raised, that

that they were aiming at the overthrow of what is called the British constitution, for the sake of procuring power to themselves. It is well known how solicitous they have since been, and with what little success, to show how well they are affected to the government. Some were simple enough to declare, that, if they could but obtain the repeal of the Test laws, they would never ask for any thing more. How ridiculous it was for them thus to attempt to fetter their own inquiries, and to check their own exertions!

They began at the wrong end, and proceeded in a wrong way. Their error, it must be owned, was mine too. Time and persuasion serve the cause of truth far more effectually than associations. The Dissenters are ever talking against the doctrines and forms of particular established churches. Had they uniformly objected to the principle of establishments, as corrupting and defeating the good ends of religion, their success, in their individual capacities, for what they apprehend the cause of truth, would have been greater. The ran-
cour of doctrinal disputes would have died away. Sects and parties would have been lost in the search for truth. Were temporal interest out of the question, all would agree to differ. Certainly the kingdom of Christ is not of this world; and time will be, when it shall become the common cry of rejoicing, "Babylon, " spiritual Babylon, is fallen, is fallen!" These instances are adduced, to shew the impropriety of a partial display of truth.

There is, perhaps, much room for discussion upon the subject. I appeal to honest and reflecting minds.

Many are, indeed, very averse to tell painful truths; but they should recollect, how eager the officious and the talkative are to spread them. Thus, as in many other instances, those decline the office, who are best qualified for the execution. The wise and good should really be more zealous in the cause of truth. Otherwise they rest its whole defence on those who are least fitted for the work; on the angry, the clamorous, the prejudiced, and the wicked. What, though temporal inconveniences should attend the plain and total declaration of the sentiments of the enquiring, they do their duty; their minds must be happy and at ease; the virtuous will encourage them; God will approve them; the world will amend; and the truth will prevail. If these blessings be not sufficient, let them be contrasted with the evils arising from an opposite conduct; from guile, deceit, and treachery. If it be considered how confidence is destroyed, and the pleasure of social intercourse is rooted up, by the practice of insincerity, how the artful and the dishonest are often snared in their own devices, surely reflecting minds will conclude, that honesty is the best policy; that integrity is a most valuable treasure; and that nothing so much becomes the friends of truth, as a free and ingenuous temper.

Even the frank acknowledgment of *faults* will be well received by the wise and good. Hence, persons may be led to deal honestly and fairly with themselves; and to amend all those dispositions which are contrary to reason and virtue. No kind of knowledge can be so truly beneficial to the children of men, as the know-

ledge

ledge of themselves, and the true state of their condition and expectations. Hence, they should learn to beware of that worst kind of dissimulation, which goes by the name of Hypocrisy. Who does not see the wicked absurdity of pretending to conceal themselves from the knowledge of the most high God, of a Being universally and always present, who sees effects in their causes, to whom the most distant futurity is present, and those things, which are to be, seem as if they were.

Such is the extensive nature and usefulness of truth, in a speculative, moral, and religious view. It comprehends all valuable knowledge; and requires the utmost, purest, sincerity, in heart and life. It improves and enlarges the minds of the children of men: it teaches them to scorn duplicity and meanness: it raises its friends above the world: it gains them the goodwill of the worthy: and will finally entitle them to the approbation of their heavenly Father; to the blessedness of that future state, which has been revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence, great rewards are promised to faith; which, being founded on good principles and careful enquiry, cemented with integrity, and adorned with the purest sincerity, is indeed the best and noblest disposition of the human mind; a distinguished honor in times of danger and temptation; a virtue of apostolic growth, yet fit to be cultivated in every age; and the best pledge for the felicity of the heavenly world. As the excellence of a plant is determined by the soundness of its root, so the motives and intentions of the heart characterize the actions of mankind.

But surely truth and sincerity present the best and noblest motives for the growing improvement of the dispositions and behaviour.

Where, then, are they, who did not " come into the world to bear witness unto the truth ? "

But how must truth be obtained ? In general, deliverance must be sought from every false bias, from every unworthy prejudice, from whatever is inconsistent with reason, and from whatever would lead mankind astray from the general good.

But prejudice is so mortal an enemy to truth, that it demands a more serious attack, and a more particular consideration of its nature, evil, and cure. Thus, perhaps, will be furnished the best rules for the attainment of truth.

Such is the intention, such the subject, of the following discourse, which forms a natural sequel to the present.

As a proper close of this, be it observed, that, if christians apply for information to the everlasting Gospel, and pray for the assistance of the God of sincerity and truth, they will not, probably, be long in being blessed with all the moral advantages of such a treasure. Whilst they live, they will be useful; and when they die, they will be filled with the joyful hope of everlasting happiness.

II.

ON THE NATURE AND EVILS OF PREJUDICE.

THREE are several passages in the Gospel, which place the force of prejudice in a striking point of view. When Jesus Christ astonished his countrymen with his instructions, so as to lead them to enquire, " Whence has this man this wisdom and these mighty works?" the voice of envy answered, " Is not this the carpenter's son." Matthew xiii. 15.

In the same manner, when the officers of the chief priests and pharisees, who were sent to watch and seize the Messiah, came back to their employers, and alledged as a reason for their not executing their commission, " Never man spake like this man," these haughty men replied, Have ye also been deceived? " Have any of the rulers or of the pharisees believed on him? But the multitude, who know not the law, are cursed." John vii. 46. 49.

In all ages and nations it has been too common to put like questions, and to draw a like conclusion. " What do the great think of these matters? 'Tis pity, that the pearl of knowledge should be trodden under the hoof of the swinish multitude." Such is the language of those who would keep mankind in ignorance, barbarism, and slavery.

When the cautious, timid, and worldly Nicodemus, so far influenced by the love of truth, inquired, whether the Jewish law condemned any before their con-

duct and actions were examined? the prejudiced assembly exclaimed, "Dost thou too come out of Galilee? Search and see, for no prophet hath ever risen out of Galilee." v. 50. 53.

Some have supposed that, after this declaration, the assembly broke up in a tumultuous manner. It was a declaration, which flew in the face of truth. For Jonah and Nahum were of Galilee. Thus, an unexamined assertion, though false, is often used to support the cause of error and superstition.

I know not, however, a stronger or more striking instance of the force of prejudice, than that which is shewn in the account of Nathaniel, at the end of the first chapter of the Gospel of John. To his character, Jesus Christ bore a most excellent testimony, when he declared him to be "an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile." From his history, however, it seems, as if sincerity itself could not altogether preserve the children of men from the power of prejudice. The friends of truth may be honest, yet if they be too indolent to enquire, their minds may be biased by prepossessions, which are not founded on reason or on facts. Thus, when Philip invited Nathaniel to come and see Jesus, who, he said, answered to the character given of the Messiah by Moses and the prophets, even the guileless Israelite was so prejudiced as to ask, "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" "Come and see," replied the meek and ingenuous Philip. He was not angry with his honest friend for being swayed by a prejudice, from which perhaps he himself was but just delivered.

He

He only wished and invited him to examine, and judge for himself.

Let justice be done to the character of Nathaniel. Though under an undue bias, he was so far open to conviction, as to comply with the invitation of Philip. He went to see Jesus, and was, from certain circumstances, which the history does not fully explain, so persuaded that he was the Messiah, that all his prejudices vanished away, and he declared him to be the Son of God, and the King of Israel.

These instances from the scriptures may perhaps open the nature and force of prejudice; show its inconveniences, disadvantages, and evils, and point out the mode and rules for its cure. In vain, as it has appeared, may any persons be persuaded of the nature and excellency of truth, if they be under the influence of any wrong bias, of any unreasonable prepossession. If they be under the dominion of prejudice, they may go on in error for ever.

What, then, is prejudice?

A prejudice is a judgment formed before examination, without examination, from indolence, haste, or passion, with carelessness, or after a very superficial and partial enquiry, against, or in favour of, persons or things, studies, pursuits, employments, speculations, or principles.

They, who would judge, should compare; and they, who compare, should be well acquainted with the objects of comparison. The grand remedy, then, for the disorder of prejudice, is examination.—People must “go and see.”

In the sequel it is proposed to examine some of the striking pictures of prejudice in general ; and of some prejudices in particular.

If a prejudice be entertained against persons, nothing, which they can say or do, will seem right to those, who are disposed to think evil of them. Their faces are thought the deceitful coverings of bad hearts, and the best of their words or actions may of course be ascribed to mean designs and unworthy motives. On the other hand, they who are prejudiced in favour of others, are unwilling to find any fault with them, and are ready on all occasions to vindicate the folly, or even wickedness, of their conduct.

These prejudices are strikingly exemplified in the behaviour of such as unite themselves with any particular party. The advocates for contrary opinions can do nothing right, and their own friends can do nothing wrong in their eyes.

They, who are prejudiced against places, will be disposed to say with Nathaniel, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth ? yet there Jesus Christ prepared his mind for the events of his future life, and laid the foundation of that Gospel; which is fitted to promote the everlasting happiness of all the children of men. What have places to do with greatness of ability, with excellence of character ?

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear ;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

GRAY'S ELEGY.

The

The children of men are indeed for the most part the creatures of the circumstances in which they are placed; but few are found destitute of a capacity for information and improvement.

In the remotest haunts, in the rudest, most uncultivated, and desolate spots, the faculties of human nature are called into exertion. In the most retired hamlets are found many a rural genius, the oracles and artists of the place, who are encouraged to exercise those powers of body and mind, which contribute to the general comfort, welfare, and happiness.

They, who think no place or country equal to their native soil, would do well to stay there; for, if they travel, they draw upon themselves the laughter and contempt of the world. Surely Britons are rising superior to this prejudice, which has justly drawn upon them the ridicule of Europe; and are beginning to learn, that arts, knowledge, and liberty, may flourish on continental ground.

How common is it for mankind to despise one another's studies, employments, and pursuits! Without question, it is a noble office to superintend and direct the cultivation and improvement of the mind and heart; to train up children in the way which is good; to teach the young idea how to shoot; to distribute mental, moral, and religious information; to lay down the duties of human nature; and to prepare the children of men for glory, honour, and immortality. By the customs of the world, this office may be monopolized by a certain class; but it is obviously incumbent on parents and heads of families to provide such an education for their

their children and domestics, as may render them useful now, and blessed for ever. Surely all who understand religion have authority to teach it. In whatever station, employment, or profession, provided it be innocent, every rational being may and ought to make known the goodness of God, the duties and expectations of the children of men, or at least, may and ought so to exemplify the beauty and excellence of virtue, as to induce others to pursue the same track, which, if revelation be true, will end in everlasting happiness. Any may be pious and good, in the field or in the city.

The shepherds of the plains may bless God for his goodness, and use their utmost endeavours to deserve the heavenly kindness, by a faithful discharge of all those duties which religion demands. The meanest artificers are susceptible of religious gratitude, and may feel the pleasure and reap the benefit of devotion in the very midst of their employments. Whatever occupation ministers to the real happiness and improvement of the mind, may surely be followed with innocence and virtue, and contribute to prepare the mind for rendering itself acceptable to God for everlasting ages.

That there are employments, which are not consistent either with honesty or justice, may be allowed, and is sufficiently evident. These should be declined from principle; but no prejudice should be entertained against any. It is well when persons are fond of their own business, and engage in it with that steady perseverance, which is likely to insure success. But the well-disposed should beware of entertaining any such overweening opinion of their own abilities or manner

of life, as may prevent them from doing justice to others, or lead them to lay any thing in the way of their duty, or of their own.

They, who are prejudiced against persons and offices, gradually form an undue bias against their speculations and principles; and in favour of their own. Thus, they do the greatest injury to themselves, and place obstacles in the way of truth. They, who are neither wise nor good; may possibly, though not with equal advantage, lay down the principles of knowledge and virtue, though it be justly lamented, when any act inconsistently with their principles; yet this is not a sufficient reason why any should reject the principles themselves.

They also may be led into great errors, who, from being partial to persons, embrace their opinions, which they do not carefully examine. Inquirers after truth should put themselves on their guard, that they may not be biased by any considerations, which are independent of reason and argument.

They should likewise beware of those prejudices, the reverse of what have been mentioned, which would lead them to conceive too unfavourably of such as differ, or too favourably of such as agree, with them in opinion. Without doubt, truth is but one; yet few there are who find it. Who can be fully assured, that they are not in some degree interested or prejudiced themselves? If the children of men be the creatures of the circumstances in which they are placed, how do even the friends of truth know, that in certain situations, they themselves should not become the votaries of

of error and superstition? Whilst, therefore, they would willingly teach others their mistakes, they should feel that compassion for them, which, in their state, they, themselves, would require; and should blend the spirit of candour and meekness, with that of honesty and persuasion.

Such are the general features of prejudice. It obstructs the usefulness, it bars the happiness, of those who are under its influence. It leads them to form wrong and unjust opinions of others; and, as evil often multiplies itself, it leads others to form wrong and unjust opinions of them.

Prejudice often springs from conceit; and thus may bring those, who are under its dominion, to that fatal state, the ignorance of themselves. Hence, they undertake that, for which they are not fitted; and will not engage in those things, for which they were evidently designed. Prejudice makes them deaf to the voice of instruction, and hardens them against scenes of distress. They listen not to those, of whom they have conceived an unfavourable opinion; and thus, probably, are often the greatest enemies of themselves. On the other hand, they think too well of those, whose advice may conduct them into what is evil and wrong.

Whilst they are in this manner surrounded by the mists of prejudice, the light of reason and truth can never pierce through the gloom. Every thing appears to them in a false and wrong point of view; and they run the risk of going down to the grave with their errors and imperfections on their heads.

This is a sad state, in which scarcely any would allow

low themselves to be. Seldom are circumstances so very unfavourably disposed. Many may have a love for truth in general, and may heartily pursue it; but some particular prejudices may cloud their sight, and intercept their progress.

It is proposed to examine into these.

Whoever form notions, which are not founded on facts and experience, or draw conclusions, without making previous necessary observations, must fill their minds with prejudices. In every branch of knowledge it has been too common to frame theories and speculations, before all the particulars connected with the subject have been fairly and thoroughly examined. Hence have arisen those wild notions, which, with unthinking persons, have brought wisdom into disrepute. The learned, it is certain, have their prejudices, as well as the illiterate. They, only, are truly wise, who apply their knowledge to practical and useful purposes; and cause it to minister to the happiness and improvement of human life. Too long have the learned, as they have been called, amused or fatigued mankind with their ingenious fancies, the offspring of wild imagination, unsupported by experiments; empty as dreams, and baseless as the visions of the night. At length nothing was taken for granted, at least in the world of nature, but what was founded on observation and experience.

It would have been well, if the same mode of judging had been applied to every kind of knowledge whatever. Then the children of men would not have been perplexed with those endless systems, so contrary to

reason, which check their inquiries, trammel the freedom of discussion, and enchain them to error and superstition. Respecting a state of civil society, there are, indeed, abundant prejudices; yet none are so pernicious as those which bar innovation and improvement. But, separated and insulated as I wish to be from all political and religious parties, sects and denominations whatever, I feel little interested about the prejudices which concern them. Every association, as far as I can judge, requires such sacrifices to be made, as to me seem to be inconsistent with integrity. Numbers cannot make truth. It is independent of votes. Reason alone can win over disciples to what is right, and just, and good. It is a prejudice, therefore, to lean to any thing else. Hence, all the great duties of human life may be classed under one head. The friends of truth and of mankind may judge of the social, and of the civil, by their tendency to the general good. Thus, they will deliver themselves from all those abstract and litigious disputes concerning rights and privileges, ambiguous and unmeaning terms, which portion out the children of men into so many tribes, secluded and separated from one another, without any common interest, or any common tie. Were the wise and good to attend solely to the duties incumbent upon them; were they to consider their social and civil condition as lying entirely within the regulation of morality; were all men to direct the whole of their conduct by a regard to the general good, as involving their own particular happiness; and, above all, were they to resolve, that they would hearken only to the voice

voice of reason, and yield to nothing but the power of persuasion, a remedy would soon be provided for all the evils in the world.

The day may be distant, and it may be thought difficult for individuals to stem the vast and rapid torrent of errors, which pours like a deluge upon the civil condition of man; but, if truth be irresistible, there is every possible encouragement. The smallest pebble stirs the lake. No good effort is lost, and all things will and must work together for universal and everlasting good.

If application had never been made to any other interference than the force of reason, truth would have been far more prevalent; but men have called in temporal power to support their want of argument, and have not been willing to depend upon persuasion alone. God knows, what duplicity has been used to lead persons farther than they would otherwise have been disposed to go; and the issue has usually been, that their prejudices have been alarmed, and they have returned to the fortresses of error and superstition. Mankind are not to be deluded, even into truth and justice. Evil must not be done, that good may come.

Most of the moral prejudices of mankind arise from an inattention to their true interest, from not looking to the final issues of things, and from not reflecting with proper comprehension of mind, that their happiness and their duty are one and the same.

But it is not private, personal, temporal utility alone, to which mankind should appeal for the regulation of their conduct. Virtue is indeed happiness, but of its

own peculiar kind. It gives health to the body, peace to the mind. It is attended with the approbation, esteem, and affection of the wise and good. It spreads the influence of worthy example, and affects the welfare of society. Finally, if revelation be true, goodness hath "the promise, not only of the present life, " but of that which is to come."

But, of all prejudices, none are so numerous and pernicious, as those which concern the subject of religion. If the best things be capable of the worst abuse, they, who pretend to judge in any important business before examination, and without examination, with haste or passion, in a light, partial, or superficial manner, must expect to fall into the greatest errors: They, who go against those common principles, which are agreeable to reason and truth, are most assuredly under the influence of prejudice, and must soon become the children of superstition.

Were any, for instance, to deny the being of a God, they would presently be lost in difficulties not to be fathomed. They could not account for themselves, for their senses, or for any of the objects of their senses. As the design and end of every thing seem to be good, it is reasonable to trust in the benevolence of God, a principle founded on justice, or on a regard to the general welfare of the creation. Can any religious notions be true, which are inconsistent with these? or are there any doctrines in the Gospel, which cannot be reconciled with the proper unity and perfect goodness of God?

As I believe such principles and doctrines to be founded

founded on prejudice, I have never failed using my endeavours to show, that they are fallacious and groundless; but I would not depart from the spirit of candid inquiry, which should keep me always open to conviction, and lead me merely to say, if I be wrong, I wish only to be better informed; if I be right, think with me.

The proper cure for prejudice is examination. Nothing can be true, which is contrary to experience and facts. In doubtful cases, inquirers should examine both sides of the question, and use their most strenuous endeavours to keep their minds even and unbiassed, till they have fairly and thoroughly examined. Whilst they are upon the search for truth, they should remain superior to every passionate emotion, and never suffer anger, envy, bigotry, or any other unworthy or wrong feeling, to cloud their understanding and stop their inquiry.

They, who are prejudiced against persons from their looks, words, or actions, should consider, that little dependence can be placed upon the knowledge gained of the character from the countenance, that the meaning of words may be mistaken, and that, in short, nothing but long observation of the general demeanour, can make one man properly acquainted with the motives and intentions of another's heart.

By noticing the errors of others, the wise correct their own.

Hence, they should beware of entertaining notions, contrary to those general principles, which appear to be so firmly established, and so thoroughly approved. They are as much prejudiced, who will not receive

what is founded on reason, as they, who credulously swallow what is contrary to it.

If, then, persons be well disposed and hearty, sincere and diligent, in the search for truth; if they examine every thing by its conformity with reason, and its tendency to the greatest good; if they be well acquainted with their own minds, and beg their heavenly Father to dispel their errors; they may expect to be in some degree delivered from those prejudices, which cause so many evils and mistakes among the children of men. Whenever any prejudice is rising like a mist upon them, whenever they feel inclined to pass a judgment before, and without, examination, with haste or passion, after a partial survey, against, or in favour of, persons, places, employments, or principles, let them remember the advice of Philip, "Come and see."

Let them examine all things, and hold fast that which is good.

Thus, they will be prepared to act with sincerity in all the events, and under all the circumstances, of human life. Thus, they will gradually become fitted for that future blessed state, in which every prejudice will be scattered, and the light of truth will shine for evermore.

III.

THE OBLIGATION OF SINCERITY IN DECLARING
THE TRUTH.

"THE lip of truth," says Solomon, "is established for ever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment." Prov. xii. 19.

Surely this observation is just. Surely a strict regard to truth is necessary in the commerce of mankind. They who addict themselves to falsehood soon forfeit influence, reputation, credit, and character. Neither sincerity nor honesty is any longer allowed them.

Some have pleased themselves with stating certain cases in which it is not only allowable to deviate from truth, but in which it would be wrong to adhere to it.—Human duty certainly consists in promoting the greatest good upon the whole. If, then, it can be shewn that, in any instance, a departure from truth will, *in its remotest consequences*, effect a greater increase of the general happiness, than the most rigid observance of its laws, it cannot but be admitted that such a departure is not unlawful.

But many cases have been put which are not likely to happen; and even these cases have been partially considered by those who have argued that the obligations of truth are not universal. There are, it may be, some few instances, in which it may seem difficult for persons to determine how they should act. These instances call for their most diligent and impartial attention.

tention. Whenever they are in doubt, they should not make a hasty examination. All their discretion must be used, and all their honesty must be exercised. Gentle minds may be tempted to decline telling painful truths; but the wise and good should be careful how they leave this disagreeable office to the talkative and the simple.

A regard to expediency and policy leads further than may at first be imagined. They tend to make men selfish and worldly, and render them timid and irresolute in the cause of truth and duty. If they do not lead *them* into error, they may have a pernicious effect upon others; especially upon those who are not sufficiently given to reflection, or whose prevailing motive is private interest.

Whenever, therefore, any one is tempted to disguise the truth, he should at least consider first the necessity of the case; he should weigh all the probable and real advantages; he should reflect on the influence of his example; and, above all, he should remember how much he may weaken in himself a regard and love for truth, by a departure from it on any the most trifling occasion.

Veracity and sincerity are not only necessary but useful in society. They unite the children of men to one another in bonds of the closest and most endearing fellowship. They who depend upon others, should give others reason to depend upon them. They who deceive, can expect only to be deceived. A fair and upright behaviour secures the esteem even of those who are not distinguished for it. In the commerce of the world

world nothing is so serviceable as that sterling honesty which scorns all mean deceit, all low cunning, all paltry equivocation, and every tendency to dissemble.

Many plead in favour of telling the truth by halves; as if it were just to delude mankind into what is right, and to take up the arms of error in the cause of integrity.

But if the truth be only partially told, it is too often as open to objections as if it were error; and the whole host of prejudices become united, before truth can come with any advantage to the attack. And were it indeed adviseable never to give offence, are not the children of error and superstition in general much sooner roused to indignation by hints against their actions, than by an honest declaration and defence of the truth? Is not, at least, an advantage given them to misrepresent the truth, and to calumniate its injudicious friends? Is not this advantage frequently embraced with eagerness, and pushed to its utmost extent.

Bacon has well observed, that " knowledge is power;" and it may be added, that the influence of reason is so strong that nothing can bear it down. Its progress may be slow, but it is effectual. If twenty persons were but to tell the whole truth to-day, and to accompany it with its proper arguments, thousands might believe it to-morrow.

Is it not the duty of christians to observe the directions of Jesus, " What I tell you in darkness, speak " ye in light: what ye hear in the ear, proclaim upon " the house-tops."

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There may, however, be a time to keep silence; which the wise will not fail to discover and observe. Sometimes a regard to truth itself may lead its friends not to declare their opinions. If persons be not disposed or likely to consider, it is vain to think of compelling them. If it be not probable they will be convinced, wherefore should any labour to convince them? Nay, is that not danger of riveting them in error, by opposing those prejudices which cling to them as the ivy clings to the oak?

There is, however, an infallible rule, if men will only apply it. The general good, fairly and thoroughly considered, will unerringly determine them. On subjects of importance, therefore, it is unquestionably their duty not merely to profess what they believe, but to support their faith by the most convincing arguments they can collect. What though the friends of truth do subject themselves to inconveniences,—what though the unthinking reproach them,—what though the worst of worldly evils fall upon them,—are they not in the way of their duty? and have not many of the greatest and best characters whom the world ever saw preceded them in the same path?

Would the children of men never desert “the ‘vantage ground of reason,’” truth would be found and acknowledged.—It is manifest that those teachers, at least, are not to be justified, who conceal from their pupils any thing of what they come to learn. All persons, indeed, speak their sentiments upon the works and appearances of nature, without molestation, hindrance, or reserve. But when religion, or some other subjects,

subjects, which concern the happiness of human life, come under consideration, the friends of mankind are informed how useful it is to conceal their opinions; and not only to conceal, but to deceive, by using language which conveys one idea to the wise, and another to the vulgar. It is our duty to discuss every subject which may minister to the comfort and improvement of mankind. How absurd, then, considered in this light, are the common rules of fashionable conversation! We debar ourselves from every interesting subject through a false fear of disputation; and the consequence is, that every dispute, when it happens to occur, becomes, what is apprehended, a kind of tempest in the intellectual world. Were all to speak what they believe to be the whole truth, these angry debates would seldom occur: The friends of truth would be better informed; each would be conscious of his own benevolent intentions, and would be ready to impute like motives to others.

Surely they are much deceived who imagine it of little consequence what sentiments are entertained of God and religion. One single truth may in itself seem of small moment; but if it be traced through all its connections and effects, it will probably be seen that it continually rises and increases in value. Besides, in the endless diversity of opinions, Truth can be but one; and they may be long in arriving at the end of their journey, who do not take the best and shortest path. By not honestly advancing and maintaining their opinions, they may obstruct the progress of religious knowledge, and be accessory to that criminal

nal indifference, which not unfrequently goes under the specious name of moderation and liberality. If any be known to dissemble, (and who can long keep it unknown?) they will experience all those inconveniences which attend a disregard to truth. They will be unhappy in their own minds: They must be continually upon their guard lest they be discovered: They will lose the esteem of the wise, virtuous, and discerning; and will have no just pretensions to worth and consistency of character.

They should not, however, be so solicitous to make known what opinions they have embraced, as for what reasons they have embraced them.

The holy scriptures direct christians not to conceal any part of the counsel of God; and the holy scriptures reveal what that counsel is. To them alone, then, let their advocates honestly appeal; whilst they lay them open to the freest and fairest discussion.

It must be acknowledged, indeed, to be comparatively a small matter what religious sentiments men embrace, unless in the whole of their conduct they pay an inviolable regard to truth and sincerity. But it must be remembered, on the one hand, that they who continue sincere and steady in the profession of their religious opinions, will be disposed uniformly to enlist in the service of truth; and, on the other hand, that if, in the common affairs of life, they distinguish themselves as the friends of truth, they will enter with surprising advantages in their favour upon the considerations of religion, and will be most likely to attain those certain and happy principles which nothing will ever

ever efface, which may make them wiser and better in the present state, and render them blessed for ever.

The virtues and the vices are always in close compact, in firm alliance. They who distinguish themselves by a love and regard for truth, stand very high in the opinion and esteem of the wise and good. These are the persons to whom others entrust their lives, their property, or whatever they hold dear. Mankind are persuaded that such persons will not betray the confidence which is placed in them. A high sense of honour usually dwells with them. Every thing mean they regard with abhorrence.

Surely there is a beautiful consistency, a delightful harmony, in the union of the virtues. In persons of real honour, of steady integrity, there is a noble foundation laid for a temple consecrated to religion and general goodwill.

But kind affection and brotherly love cannot have any place in those who have thrown aside all regard for truth; in those who are devoted to insincerity and deceit: For wherefore should they be insincere, wherefore should they deceive, but for their own private and particular interest? Whatever pretensions they may make to generosity, charity, or piety, it may justly be questioned whether these dispositions spring from the heart; or whether, in reality, they are not assumed for some interested purpose; to secure the good opinion of the world, to acquire advantage, or fame.— Truth, therefore, is worthy to be sought, and fit to be cultivated, for its own sake, and for the sake also of

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those lasting advantages with which it is generally attended.

The greatest and best characters, in every age, have been eminent for the most sacred regard to truth. They have not only searched for knowledge with unremitting perseverance, but they have cherished in their minds those noble and honourable principles, which set them above every temptation to falsehood and deceit.

Of Jesus Christ, particularly, it is written, that "guile was not to be found in his mouth." He himself gave this glorious testimony to Nathaniel, that he was "an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile." It was considered as a blot in the character of Peter, that in the hour of danger he meanly denied his master. Their persisting in an ostentatious and impudent lie was the cause of the death of Ananias and Sapphira. Their sad fate was unquestionably intended as a warning to the disciples to persevere in the paths of sincerity and truth. Had the disciples not thus persevered, christianity might have sunk into everlasting oblivion. For who would give credit to those who are not the followers of truth, yet who constantly appeal to the sincerity of their testimony?

With what manly indignation did Jesus expose the evasion and insincerity of the Pharisees! With what animation did he express himself at the bar of Pilate! "For this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth." What simplicity and sincerity does he recommend in the precept, "Let your communication be

" be yea, yea ; nay, nay." If the passage be rendered, " Let your yes be yes, and your no, no," christians have a precept which forbids every kind of deceit, and enjoins the strictest veracity. Wherefore, indeed, should there be a revelation, but to enlighten mankind with the knowledge of the truth, and to furnish them with those just principles which would keep them faithful and steadfast to the end ? " Sanctify my disciples," prayed Jesus, " with thy truth : thy word is truth."—The main corruptions which have been introduced into the christian religion have been the offspring of insincerity and dissimulation. They have sprung from dishonest shame, and from a blameable desire to keep well with the world. Nothing so much at present prevents the spread of the everlasting gospel; as that worldly spirit and temper which have infected those who call themselves the disciples of Christ.

When, however, it is written, that the most glorious blessings are promised to the faithful, christians are not to understand that the blessings will be theirs only who have adopted the right system of religious belief; but that all they who faithfully profess what they believe upon conviction, who act up to the light within them, and who are sincere in their opinions and endeavours, will " receive the end of their faith in the salvation of their souls."—Truth and sincerity are at any time the brightest jewels in the crown of faith; but nothing so much adorns the friends of truth, as a steady, apostolical virtue, in the midst of apostacy and danger.

O that all the children of men would resolve to "buy the truth, and sell it not!" Nor is it only of consequence that they should be steady to their profession; but they should not disgrace it by a mean, dishonest, or deceitful behaviour. The friends of mankind should approve themselves just and upright and true: They should be particularly cautious in making promises; much more in taking oaths. The word of the honest should certainly be as good as their oath. The duty of the conscientious is to consider carefully what is right, and what is wrong; and then, without entering into unnecessary engagements, to do the right, and decline the wrong. Great is the force of example. If the otherwise well-disposed and enlightened make rash promises, or take oaths in a heedless manner, there are those who, guided by low interest and mistaken self-love, will make light of their word, and will not scruple to perjure themselves in the sight of the Most High God.

Surely when approved and popular moralists consider a great multitude of the oaths taken in this country as matter of course, and of little signification, it becomes the friends of mankind to shew the fallacy of their reasonings. Whatever commandments they break, whatever duties they decline, whatever injustice they commit, they in fact, in a degree, teach others to do the same.

Hence we should cautiously avoid all those practices, which, however they may be understood, however they may be explained away, have certainly a baneful influence

influence on those whom some may choose to call the lower ranks in society. If servants, for instance, be ordered to say that those whom they serve are not at home, when they are indisposed or engaged, *they*, at least, are taught to lie; and, with a cowardly spirit, are used as the instruments of injustice. Why would not the real truth do? and where is the harm of telling improper visitors that the wise and good do not wish for any intimacy with them?

The world may gild over these venial offences, as some may think proper to call them, and may make nice distinctions between greater and smaller falsehoods; but it is impossible by any arguments to defend the injustice of deceit; and it may be said of the most innocent who are given to its practice, that they are deceiving themselves, and so relaxing the sacred obligations of morality; till, in the time of temptation, they themselves become totally defenceless, and at once enter, without any resistance or compunction, into the service of treachery and lying.

Many profess to be shocked with a profane oath; and I know not why they should be less so with every instance of dissimulation among the children of men. An oath of this kind may proceed from the transient emotions of passion; but guile of every kind issues from the deliberate determination of the heart, and is therefore worse in its nature, and more dreadful in its influential consequences.

These arguments should lead well-disposed minds to be equally correct in procuring and communicating information,

formation, and to beware of that too common propensity to fiction and embellishment, in those who have gained the unfortunate character of telling a good story.

Surely it shews no great genius to tell an extravagant lie; nor can any dependence be placed on those who are habitually addicted to the practice.

It is particularly incumbent upon children to attend to these observations.

Nothing is so tender as character and reputation: If they be once lost, they are scarcely, if ever, recovered.

On these accounts, it is wrong and dangerous to tell a falsehood even in jest.

If the young thus mock at the sacred obligations of truth; if they thus wantonly sport with what is invaluable; if, for their pleasure and amusement, they can lie and deceive; it will easily be conceived that any present interest will, with greater force, compel them to the same artful and disingenuous conduct.

How far they may be led away from truth and sincerity, what lengths they may go in the path of falsehood, what shocking and detestable habits they may form of dishonest meanness and lying, they may easily gather, when they reflect that one lie may require many lies to make it good; that they may repeat them frequently to many persons, till no one will have any thing to do with them; and that in despair they may commit actions which may involve them in misery, or bring them to an untimely end.

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For this reason parents should be on their guard, lest children should catch the infection of deceit from them.

Their offspring will very soon take them for their pattern: strong, then, should be their motives to set them a good example.

When parents consider what influence they have over their children, they should be doubly cautious, for their own sakes and for theirs, not to be insincere, or to deceive. Hence they are in some measure accountable to God for the future conduct of the rising generation.

If parents do not aim to cherish in their children a love and regard for truth; if they always speak and act at random, and sometimes with a bad, deceitful, treacherous, and artful design, they may be sure the guilt of their offspring will pour a torrent of misery upon them; their repentance will be their torture, even though it should produce their own amendment. It is ineffectual, because it is too late; it cannot remedy the evil which has been occasioned, because the evil has been done to the mind of another. But if, on the other hand, they cultivate in their children a sacred regard for truth and sincerity, and if they set them examples suited to recommend these excellent virtues, they will be blessed with their good and dutiful behaviour; they will rejoice in the good character, in the unfulfilled reputation, which they have enabled them to acquire and maintain; they will receive increasing pleasure and satisfaction from the

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consciousness that they have fulfilled their duty, and answered the ends of a wise and good Providence, by bringing up those who will serve him on earth, and be admitted along with them into the happy family of heaven.

F I N I S.



